

Rainer Kreuzhof, Wolfgang Ockenfels\*

## On the Proper Essence of Christian Economic Ethics\*\*

In recent times, the question about the proper essence of a Christian economic ethics has rarely been asked explicitly. However, the concept of a post-secular society, as presented by Jürgen Habermas, offers renewed access. The necessary foundation for this approach involves the relationship between belief and reason as the basis for communication, the concept of 'being made in God's own likeness' as regulating factor and the association with the Christian way of life as a prerequisite for responsible economic activity. One possible consequence hereof is to see the social market economy as a third way, situated between socialism and capitalism, with its extra-economic prerequisites and its particular relationship between market and state. After all, the aim is also to consider the role of the Church as a global player and an intermediary of values for a civil society.

**Key words:** Christian economic ethics, Catholic Social Teaching, post-secular society, political theology, social market economy

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\* Prof. Dr. Dr. Rainer Kreuzhof, Program manager Human Resource Management and Economic Ethics at Fachhochschule Flensburg – Flensburg University of Applied Sciences, Kanzleistraße 91-93, D – 24943 Flensburg. E-mail: kreuzhof@fh-flensburg.de.

Prof. Dr. Dr. Wolfgang Ockenfels OP, Chair of Christian Social Science at the Trier Theological Faculty and Spiritual Adviser to the Association of Catholic Entrepreneurs (Bund Katholischer Unternehmer), Universitätsring 19, D – 54296 Trier.  
E-mail: ockenwol@uni-trier.de.

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## Definition of the problem

The question on the proper essence of Christian economic ethics has hardly been asked explicitly any more in recent times (Wilhelms 2007: 494). Why did it not happen? In the past, for Christian social ethics – which also includes economic ethics – such foundations were part of the standard (Brinkmann 1978: 461 ff.; Kerber 1978: 547 ff.). Did we lose sight of this question in the secular societies because religious positions were pushed aside into private life; and what does the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas mean when he speaks, in this context, of a “post-secular society” that should conserve the moral potentials of religions (Habermas 2001)? We should continue by dealing with these questions if laying the foundations for Christian economic ethics is to be successful in today’s conditions.

### 1. Post-secular society

If we ask for the meaning of the term post-secular society, first of all two distinctions can be made. On the one hand, the concept of post-secular society presupposes a secularization process, and on the other hand, the assumption that this process has come to its end does not mean that, as a result, a closed, for example Christian, society would be the consequence. But rather, post-secular society can only mean that secular patterns of interpretation – just like all other ones – must justify themselves in the discourse and that, besides religious ones, they subsist, but cannot enjoy any automatic preference.

However, with the religion sociologist José Casanova, we have to question the presuppositions of this position advocated by Habermas. For instance, in his Eurocentric view, Habermas assumes that religious groups continue to exist within an environment that is otherwise predominantly secular (Habermas 2008: 37 f.). But Casanova questions this process of secularization in several respects by pointing first at the fact that the decline of religious life, which is noticeable in Central Europe, can be considered an exception on the world stage. Second, he states, the idea that from an authoritarian, religious society, a democratic, secular one has arisen in the wake of modernization, is a myth. According to him, the denominational State was rather the consequence of the Thirty Years War, and in many cases, in particular, religious groups were involved in democratization processes. And also with respect to the potential of religions for violence, Casanova demonstrates that nearly all of the extraordinary acts of violence of the first half of the twentieth century were not religiously motivated (Casanova 2009: 8 ff.). Altogether, he refers, as a consequence, to three components of a secularization theory that are, in his view, to be distinguished from one another and between which there is no necessary interrelation: a) the theory of institutional differentiation between the secular sphere, such as the State, the economy, science on the one hand, and religious institutions on the other; b) the theory of a progressive decline of religious convictions and practices as a measure of modernization; and c) the theory of privatization of religion as a prerequisite for a modern, secular and democratic policy (Casanova 2009: 83). All in all, this discussion also shows how difficult it is for the sociological community, in view of the history of its origins,

to imagine a society that positively develops beyond the principles of Enlightenment (Scheuch 2003: 13).

For laying the foundations for Christian economic ethics, following on from the previous considerations, we have to ask the question as to what extent the economic sphere of culture has undergone a secularization process and to what extent religious communication regains importance there. When answering these questions, a very differentiated picture will emerge. While the scholastics still took it for granted to base their considerations on the Bible, Church Fathers and Aristotelian philosophy, discussing ethical questions – economic sciences as a place of reflection on economic action did not arise until the above-mentioned process of institutional differentiation. In this context, Adam Smith as one of the central protagonists of this development, with his “invisible hand”, still postulated a divine providence, but the associated connection to the deism of Scottish Enlightenment already led to the separation from the Christian faith. However, a normative Christian tradition, which was mostly oriented to Catholic Social Teaching, was preserved to a limited extent, especially where it was about putting findings of economic science into practice (Kreuzhof 2007a: 20 ff.). And even where design recommendations were rejected by pointing at the claim that economic science is free of value judgements, the Christian relation can be traced back. But where does the critical attitude towards metaphysical and normative arguments come from? When taking a closer look, this attitude corresponds to the Protestant position of the *sola fide* and the associated irrational theism. The idea that cognition can always only be external sense cognition in terms of the natural sciences hence constitutes the interesting case of a Christianization of Greek thought, which continues to have its effects – albeit unconsciously – until today (Oko 1997: 98). But do religious argumentations regain increasing importance now, so that we can speak of a post-secular society even in the sphere of the economy and economic science? At first glance, this seems to be the case for the economic science only to the limited extent mentioned before. However, if we look at where the individual deals with the problems of a meaningless economic society that result from modern globalized economic life, a completely different picture will arise. Here you can find a great number of practical religious approaches to help cope with life, but without establishing a sufficient relation with the economic science discussion (Kreuzhof 2007a: 184 ff.). In view of this situation, the question on the proper essence of Christian economic ethics arises in a more acute form.

## 2. Laying the foundations for Christian economic ethics

But what must be achieved now by laying the foundations for Christian economic ethics if it is to be successful in a post-secular society?

- First, Christian economic ethics must connect faith and reason with one another within the economic sphere of culture in a way that Christians can enter into a fertile dialogue with other religious and non-religious people.
- Second, Christian economic ethics must be based on man as the image of God if human dignity is to be deemed the standard for economic action again, even within the economic sphere of culture.

- Third, Christian economic ethics must integrate the relation between economic action and the practice of Christian life if implementation into practical action is to be successful.

### 2.1 *Fides et ratio as sources of Christian economic ethics*

From which sources can Christian economic ethics obtain its findings and to what extent can they be conveyed in a post-secular society? For Catholic Social Teaching, social ethicist Ursula Nothelle-Wildfeuer postulates a field of tension between the constitutivities of philosophy and revelation. But in doing so, the conflict between faith and reason, which is typical of the modern age, has already been touched upon and transferred to the sphere of the economy. In this context, Catholic Social Teaching built, in its development, on Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy in the first place, so that the natural order of creation is the standard for economic action. During the further development, findings of the human and technical sciences were also taken into account to a greater extent, thus recognizing the autonomy of the economic sphere of culture and the individual acting there. And finally, the current development is characterized by the fact that the order of creation and the order of salvation correlate with one another and that, hence, philosophical and theological orientations complement one another (Nothelle-Wildfeuer 1991: 777 ff.).

Apart from Catholic Social Teaching, political theology is considered another attempt to mediate between Christianity and the modern age. What is characteristic of the view advocated here is a fundamental change or shift of emphasis: (1) from “cosmocentric” to “anthropocentric” thinking, (2) from christology to eschatology and (3) from anthropology to sociology. In this context, the advocates of political theology philosophically build on Karl Marx, Ernst Bloch and/or the Frankfurt School and theologically on Sören Kierkegaard and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. By building on Neo-Marxism, faith no longer arises by personal conversion, but is a political process of liberation in practice by changing the structures of the world – i.e. including those of the Church and the economy – which are structures of sin, structures of evil (Ockenfels 1987: 29 ff.). Finally, some also directly build on the Bible as a source. In doing so, some authors skip all logical steps of the development of Christian values, impetuously directing their demands based on the Bible to the concrete reality (Utz 1994: 35 f.) or subject biblical texts to a Marxist analysis in order to contribute to a change of society in this manner (Clévenot 1980).

If we now take a look at the various attempts to mediate between Christianity and the modern age, the direct derivation of design recommendations from biblical texts seems most unsuitable to me. Not only that the authors come to completely different results in this context, but it should be difficult to convey these rationales to people with other religious and non-religious beliefs. In addition, it is questionable, at the same time, whether Christian revelation contains timeless valid considerations on a political and social order that could be directly put into practice (Kerber 1978: 559 ff.). And also political theology amounts to not much more than neo-Marxist-coined criticism of the societal conditions, rather than giving differentiated and logically founded design recommendations. Moreover, the completion of salvation is intramundanelly limited, and the exercise of Christian life is, in its core, reduced to solidaric liberation

action where sin only occurs as a subjectless, structural sin (Weber 1984: 104 ff.). What remains is, ultimately, the connection of theological and philosophical argumentations and their transfer to the economic sphere of culture as has developed within Catholic Social Teaching. In this case, the translation of religious patterns of interpretation demanded by Habermas seems to have turned out best for secular-minded people, too. This suitability is also shown by the fact that, within the more recent Protestant social ethics, the classical antimetaphysical orientation is no longer taken for granted to that extent and that, also here, an understanding of human dignity is used as a basis, which is derived from the belief that man is the image of God and which demands validity irrespective of all human recognition and appreciation (Härle 2005: 379 ff.).

## 2.2 *The personality of man as the starting point of Christian economic ethics*

If man – with his inalienable human dignity based on the idea of being the image of God – is to be the standard for economic action, the personality of man will also constitute the starting point of Christian economic ethics. But what is meant by this designation in detail and what does it mean for economic action? For social ethicist Joseph Höffner, personality means that man reaches beyond the material world by his intellect, that he has autonomy as an individual and that, with his conscience, he is destined to freedom and responsibility. But man is not only an individual, he is also designed for fellowship with others and God. This Christian interpretation of personality is also the response to the search for meaning in today's meaningless economic society (Höffner 1984: 29 ff.) as is described by Habermas and others. Social ethicist Michel Novak further sharpens this view by placing the creative person into the focus of consideration. In doing so, he criticizes Max Weber's thesis on the influence of the doctrine of predestination on the development of capitalism and points out that it was rather the Christian view of the acting person, with their right to personal economic initiative, their creativity conferred by the Creator and their entrepreneurial virtues, that essentially contributed to the creation of a new order (Novak 1998: 207 ff.).

But is this understanding of persons consistent with the image of man of the homo oeconomicus that is frequently assumed in economics? As the preceding discussion should already have shown, images of man and the associated approaches to life have a great influence on our action. In this case, erroneous ideas about human beings could result in dire consequences if individuals were, for example, exclusively reduced to their biological needs. With regard to the image of man of the homo oeconomicus, social ethicist Kerber diagnoses that, in history, a narrowed "economic", in part even downright hedonistic connotation was inherent in this concept in the first place, but that, in the ideal case, a concept without a specific image of man is also possible. For example, the homo oeconomicus must aspire to something, but this also includes meaning-oriented action and, in doing so, human beings can also orient themselves to objectively important values, he states. According to him, those who try to serve the good of humanity or justice altruistically must, however, have converted this interest in objectively important values into their own one – and hence a subjective one – in order that it can be included as a benefit in economic theory.

What can still be said about the homo oeconomicus at all in view of this ambivalence? First, the theory of action based on this concept assumes that the actions can be attributed to the actor, that is, it leaves room for responsibility. In addition, the goals that he or she sets him or herself have already been socially preconditioned, and he or she can only achieve his or her goals together with others, so that he or she must also be seen as a social being. Even if objections are to be raised against popular utilitarian interpretations of the concept of the homo oeconomicus from a Christian point of view, the preceding considerations show that these errors can be avoided as a general rule (Kerber 1991: 56 ff.). Hence, members of the Christian economic ethics community can and should, also here, enter into a fertile dialogue with the business sector.

Christian economic ethics, especially as ethics relating to the economic order, is first of all social ethics, that is, it deals with the societal prerequisites for moral action within the economic sphere of culture. But can Christian economic ethics only be pursued as social ethics, that is, without additional virtue ethics, as is maintained by some authors (Wilhelms 2007: 496)? First of all, all structural changes of economic ethics must be aspired to by human beings, and here virtues like prudence and justice are indispensable to Christian economic ethics. In addition, ethically motivated concepts like codetermination or ethical guidelines show that there is, in practice, a deficit in virtue ethics. How else could it be explained that immoral action has occurred in the enterprises in question despite these instruments? Accordingly, economic ethicist Peter Koslowski demands the commitment to a professional ethos (Koslowski 2004: 453 ff.), and this necessarily leads to a virtue ethics that aims at the acquisition of attitudes which lead to moral action. But so we have also come to the question about the reasons for immoral action, and in this context, from a Christian point of view, concupiscence and the original sin doctrine are to be referred to. And especially here the specifically Christian ethos is shown, to which Habermas can have recourse when he demands that the potential of religion be used. The attachment to God accomplished in the practice of Christian life helps to keep within bounds our own sinful desire, so that responsible action is rendered possible to a greater extent (Utz 1942: 56). This is what people intuit who are not very religious or not religious at all if they nevertheless consider religion an effective factor influencing the way of life (Kreuzhof 2007b: 457 f.).

### *2.3 Economic action and the practice of Christian life*

From the references to virtue ethics and concupiscence, it already became clear that Christian economic ethics must not deny the correlation between economic action and the practice of Christian life. But on the other hand, this does not mean that the exercise of Christian life can be reduced to moral action. When taking a closer look, it is rather about the correlation between morality and spirituality, and this is what Pope John Paul II made clear in his encyclical *Laborem exercens* by pointing out a spirituality of work where the human being takes part in God's creation work by his or her economic action. The reference to this correlation does, of course, not reduce the practice of Christian life to its moral aspect, as is occasionally claimed (Oermann 2008: 983). On the contrary, the example of the discussion on Sunday work and/or shop

opening hours in Germany precisely shows that there is, from a Christian point of view, a sphere of life “beyond work and consumption” (Kreuzhof 1999). However, within Christian economic ethics, only the interrelationships between economic action and the practice of Christian life can be addressed, which means that an economic order and the enterprises acting within it must not destroy their cultural and religious environment if they want to survive. In this context, such negative external effects of economic action can arise in two different points: (1) when avoiding negative influences on the family and (2) when avoiding negative influences on the exercise of faith.

(1) As primary socialization occurs in the family, it is, first of all, appropriate to design the working conditions in a way that family life is enabled where values based on the common good can be experienced and exercised. For this purpose, it is necessary that parents and children have enough time to spend together. By contrast, the continuous increase in shift work prevents that families have time to spend together. In this context, the extensive transfer of family life to childminders, day-care centres and all-day schools is no adequate substitute. There is simply a difference between the lasting and personal relationship between parents and children on the one hand and the professional, temporary relationship at the appropriate institutions on the other. The consequence is the inability to form lasting relationships. For this reason, institutional services offered should be kept to the absolutely necessary minimum (Etzioni 1998: 66 ff.).

(2) In addition, a transcendent link back will be beneficial, if not downright necessary, for a comprehensive moral development. For this reason, it is sensible, also from the enterprise’s point of view, not to place a burden on religious life (Utz 1994: 58 f.). Here, too, it is not about actively exerting influence, but only about avoiding negative external effects. The burden on religious life becomes especially visible by the permanent increase in the work on Sundays and public holidays and the relevant shop opening hours. Precisely the experience of the 3500-year-old Sabbath and Sunday culture can show us by its unavailability that we as human beings have personal dignity irrespective of our utility. In this way, Sunday frees us from the constraints of work and consumption, offering us spiritual impulses. Where should visions and innovation come from if we do not lead a spiritual life? (Kreuzhof 1999: 378 ff.)

### 3. Consequences of Christian economic ethics

What consequences can be drawn from laying the foundations for Christian economic ethics discussed above? Which concepts of economic order have, in this context, been presented in the past, and are they also viable for the future? And what importance might the Church have in the implementation of such ideas of economic ethics? These are questions that are to be answered in the following. In view of an increasingly globalized economy and society, this affects the Social Market Economy with its specific relationship between the market and the State on the one hand and the standing of the Church in civil society on the other.

#### 3.1 *The Social Market Economy as a global economic order*

Even if Christian economic ethics – as stated earlier – cannot be reduced to ethics relating to the economic order, this field has, up to now, been treated in the most differ-

entiated way. In the historically induced antagonism between capitalism and socialism, the focus was and still is, above all, on the question as to what extent the State should intervene in the economic process for the good of the citizens, or to what extent it has to allow them freedom also in economic action. In this context, the Social Market Economy is considered the so-called “Third Way” between the above-mentioned extreme alternatives. During the years of reconstruction after the Second World War, the German model of market economy was primarily shaped by the social doctrine of the Catholic church.

*a) Fundamentals of the Social Market Economy in terms of economic ethics*

If we ask for the fundamentals of the Social Market Economy in terms of economic ethics from a Christian point of view, we have to point, first of all, at the fact that Christian economic ethics, especially where it is based on Catholic Social Teaching, does not favour any specific economic order. In its doctrinal documents, Catholic Social Teaching rather took up the respective historical problems and formulated central principles for social ethics from a Christian point of view (Ockenfels 1989: 23). Of central importance to the economic order are, in this context, especially the statements on property and competition.

For a long time already, Catholic Social Teaching and its movement (especially in Germany) had begun to look for a “Third Way” – and brought it to bear through Bishop von Ketteler even at the level of the worldwide Church, that is, in the encyclical “*Rerum novarum*” of 1891, in which Pope Leo XIII accepted private property and the market economy, also justified freedom of association as a natural right and demanded the responsibility of the State for social policy. Here the bridge towards liberal economic ideas was built, especially via the concept of property that Leo XIII formulated by analogy with John Locke, but which was, of course, embedded in Thomas Aquinas’ ideas of the common good. (Ockenfels 2009: 11)

With regard to the freedom of competition, it is expected from politicians that, for the common good, they create a state regulatory framework which prevents the “excessive empowerment of the markets” and the distortion of competition. Monopolies and cartels should be precluded by a set of rules on competition in order that prices can evolve freely and on an equitable basis, depending on supply and demand. By free pricing, shortages are indicated and overcome. This insight was gained by Luis de Molina, S.J. through experience as early as in the 16th century – by the way, an insight that was later rendered fertile for the Social Market Economy by Walter Eucken, Joseph Höffner and Wilhelm Weber. The ban on monopolies applied, of course, all the more to the State – and therefore affected centrally administered socialism and state capitalism in the same way (Ockenfels 2009: 6 f.).

*b) Historical development of the Social Market Economy*

The fact that the Social Market Economy had not been the aim of Christian-oriented politicians from the outset is shown by the following statement. “The German State has currently the right to convert individual property by appropriate enforcement action into common property to the extent as its own existence and its internal political order stand and fall with this conversion” (Welty 1945: 31). This statement very dra-

matically sounds like state socialism, seems, in view of the present economic crisis, to be very up to date, and would today certainly meet wide approval, not only from the “Left”. However, the above sentence is a quotation from the writing “Was nun?” that Eberhard Welty wrote in an extreme emergency situation in 1945. After the disaster of the “Third Reich”, the Dominican and social ethicist Welty, who proved himself in the resistance against the Nazi regime, published a pamphlet that was to become the programmatic basis of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) – but only until the “Ahlener Programm” of 1947 (Ockenfels 2009: 3).

The fact that, nevertheless, convergence, a far-reaching synthesis between Catholic social ethics and liberal economic ideas occurred was due, not least, to Röpke’s efforts, even though it took some time until his ideas met with approval from most advocates of Catholic social ethics. The idea behind the term “Social Market Economy”, coined by Müller-Armack in 1946, (Müller-Armack 1946) was the intention to mediate between free and socially obliged societal and economic orders. This synthesis was also sought as a “Third Way” between capitalism and collectivism, as stated by Röpke as early as in 1942 (Röpke 1942: 43). Röpke is not among the liberals of the *laissez faire*, and all the less so among the exponents of the continental Enlightenment (Voltaire, Rousseau) with their constructivist, centralist thinking. Also, he rejected a strict separation between law and morality, between politics and the economy. In many points, his proximity to the English-American tradition of Enlightenment (John Locke, Adam Smith) is visible, but he is especially strongly oriented towards a humanism in the wake of the Christian-Occidental image of man and image of order (Ockenfels 2009: 11). Röpke’s declared belief with regard to the nature of the human being as a social being attached to God goes so far in its consistency that he regards the Ten Commandments as a “moral basis” for a market economy order (Röpke 1960: 25). Free private initiative and private property are two necessary “columns of a Christian-humane order of society and economy”, Röpke (1964: 321) states in accordance with Catholic Social Teaching. But they are also tied to certain attitudes of virtue, which – if they are not present – cannot be replaced by mandatory legal regimes. As higher ethical values that are indispensable for political and economic freedom and that, hence, meaningfully fulfil the “what for” of freedom, Röpke recognizes “justice, responsibility for the whole, benevolence and sympathy” (Röpke 1979: 185 f.). – by the way, values that are, to him, “more important than all economic laws and principles of national economy.” In this context, the “family, Church, real communities and tradition” are identified as authorities for the conveyance of values.

Our whole pride was, for a long time, the Social Market Economy. Even in its mutilated form, it was still very successful (Ockenfels 2009: 6). Then, after the fundamental changes of 1989, the Social Teaching of the Church and also the Social Market Economy seemingly fell behind by a liberal ideology that became increasingly prevalent and that put the case for a commercialization of all areas of life. This world-wide movement, which ultimately intended to subject everything to the orientation to economic profit and to consider almost the entire human reality by no more than market and competitive positions, has, for the time being, come to an end in the global financial and economic crisis (Marx 2010: 65).

### c) *Future viability of the Social Market Economy*

The question, however, is whether the discussion of the relationship between the market and the State, too, was resolved by itself with the year of the fundamental changes of 1989, that is, with the collapse of “real socialism” – or whether this relationship can take a new shape after the crash of capitalism of the last few months. This crash is reminiscent of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Does history catch up with us now as if no one had learned from it? It is precisely this history that those advocates of the market economy who still take the attribute “social” seriously must face and have to re-interpret it at the international level. Is there a new world-wide accumulation and monopolization of capital, so that international competition suffers from it? Is the “middle class” slowly worn down? Does the decoupling of the financial sector from the real economy not lead to wild speculation and price distortions? What about the attribution of knowledge, capital and work in a globalized stock exchange world, where short-term shareholder value thinking prevails? Are politics, culture, social and ecological arrangements increasingly overrun by private economic interests? Do new classes arise within and between the national economies? Are, accordingly, new class conflicts looming between the have-nots and the privileged owners of knowledge and capital (Ockenfels 2009: 7)?

Together with Christian social ethics, the empirical economics community should, especially today, take a look beyond “supply and demand”. That is to say, at the regulatory policy that was pursued at the time of the introduction of the Social Market Economy in Germany and that still presupposed a minimum of moral responsibility by all market participants (Ockenfels 2009: 5). After the collapse of communism and the crisis due to the aberration of an unleashed capitalism, the attention paid to Christian economic ethics could indeed grow anew. But there will only be a real Renaissance if, above all, the actors in the Church itself lift this great treasure again, get involved in political and charitable activities and make clear that Christian economic ethics is not “our best kept secret”, as it was once called in the United States, but an essential area of world-wide evangelization (Marx 2010: 68).

### **3.2 *The Church as a global player***

The considerations on the Social Market Economy presented here, first of all, show that Christian economic ethics has – because of its jnsaturalistic orientation towards reason – always been and still is open for dialogue with all beliefs and cultures. Therefore, with regard to a world ethos, Robert Spaemann’s criticism of Hans Küng’s project is to be agreed to, because a separation of morality from religion not only leads to the instrumentalization of the latter, but also, at least from a Christian point of view, leaves concupiscence as a decisive factor for immoral action out of consideration (Spaemann 2001).

Against this background, the question finally arises of who, in a globalized world with the most diverse beliefs, can exert influence on economic action in terms of Christian economic ethics, without restricting the freedom of the individual to an inappropriate extent. Can the Church, for example, become active as a global player in this context? First of all, the task of the Church is rather predominantly of a religious nature: It is, above all, about the proclamation of the Christian message of redemption

of the kingdom of God, which is not of this world, but destined for this world. Hence, “redemption” here is not equivalent to social, political or economic “liberation”, but from the religious mission follows, in a derived sense, the task of building up the economy and society in accordance with human dignity, that is to say, oriented towards the Christian-personal image of man as the starting point and norm (Ockenfels 2010: 219).

Concerning the example of Catholic Social Teaching, the influence of the Church in terms of economic ethics is shown by a “triad” of official promulgation of doctrine, scientific-theological reflection and commitment of the social movements within the Church. Like his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI underlines in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* that Catholic Social Teaching is part of the proclamation of faith and, hence, part of the task of performing missionary work. Piety and responsibility for the world simply belong together (Marx 2010: 66 f.). The Church as a *global player* offers an opportunity for this, including by creating a space where a spirituality of economy can be experienced and developed which recognizes the purpose of economic activity and leads to responsible economic action (Kreuzhof 2007: 161 ff.). For concrete economic action, the Church, especially in its doctrine, does not prescribe a specific political system or economic model as a world-wide norm, but it intends to participate in their conceptual development in a responsible manner, that is, mainly via Christian laypersons and appropriate associations that are competent and familiar with the problems in detail (Ockenfels 2010: 220).

In this context, the essential distinction between the Church and the State does not amount to a perfect or even hostile separation. In history, especially since the Investiture Controversy (1077), the “doctrine of two kingdoms”, had an effect of a permanent and fertile process of tension. Namely, it paved the way for the first separation of powers in terms of a free and pluralistic polity, according to which both powers have different tasks and each of them has the right to autonomy in its own sphere. However, churches are no associations representing the “interests” of their members, but communities of religion or belief, whose members faithfully adhere to the traditional religious claim for truth of the ecclesial message of salvation. Churches are therefore indispensable, especially as authorities for the conveyance of meaning and values in a free civil society. The free rule-of-law and welfare state depends – as constitutional expert Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde once stated, as is generally known – on value-based prerequisites that it can neither justify nor convey or guarantee (Ockenfels 2010: 227 f.).

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